

GALATIANS

Lesson 9 - 3:1-5 - "Perfected By the Spirit"

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Galatians 3:1-5 (N.A.S.B.)

You foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified? This is the only thing I want to find out from you: did you receive the Spirit by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh? Did you suffer so many things in vain—if indeed it was in vain? So then, does He who provides you with the Spirit and works miracles among you, do it by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith?

Verse 1 – The Caustic Reminder: *“You foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified.”*

Paul is ticked and says it like it is. He is writing to Christians of the Galatian region. But he calls these believers both “foolish” and “bewitched.” “Foolish” implies that they are not using their God-given, spiritually discerning minds to correctly apply the gospel of Jesus crucified. “Bewitched” implies that there is some supernatural force other than the Spirit of God that is influencing their thinking. In other words, they are responsible, even though the enemy is influencing them. This is always the case, ever since the garden of Eden, that I am responsible for my poor choices, even though the enemy has tempted me.

Each Galatian Christian had either seen Jesus die on the cross with his own eyes, or had been told the story in vivid detail. Jesus has been publically crucified as a message from the government not to oppose the authority of Rome. “Publicly” also means “vividly” or “clearly.” But Paul also says that Jesus had been publicly “portrayed” as crucified. The word “portrayed” means what you would think – that this public crucifixion was also a visible message from God. He was declaring that the price of sin had been paid for by His Son, and that relationship with God was now possible. This was further emphasized by the ripping in two of the temple veil, symbolizing that the division between man and God was now removed by the payment on the cross of Calvary. Paul was also telling the Galatians that they should know better than to try to live their spiritual life by self effort after Jesus had paid the ultimate sacrifice. His death was in a real sense, our death of self.

C.S. Lewis in his “Chronicles of Narnia, The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe” uses Aslan the lion as a Jesus figure of Narnia. He dies on the stone table to pay for the sins of the people, later to resurrect from the dead. In the book this is called the “secret magic.” We Christians might hesitate to call what Jesus did for us as “magic” but truly that’s what it is! His death supernaturally did what could be called the amazing impossible. – paying for our sin past, present and future. The Galatians failed to understand the “magic” of the provision. They knew their past sins were paid. But they failed to comprehend that their present and future sins were also paid for, and that growing as a Christian takes the same as becoming a Christian – that being, FAITH ALONE.

Now in verses 2 – 5 Paul asks four questions of the Galatians, and of each of us.

Verse 2: Question #1 - How Were You Saved? *“This is the only thing I wan to find out from you: did*

you receive the Spirit by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith?"

Simple translation: How were you saved? – By works or by faith? Christians should know that “being saved” comes with “receiving the Spirit.” Paul taught this in Romans 8:9.

Romans 8:9 However you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him.

The Galatian Christians would all have answered “by faith” – as would every true believer. This is Paul’s “set up” question, to prepare the way for his further questions which will make his point – thus, it is “the only thing I want to find out.”

Note that two specific elements are introduced in this verse. They were not mentioned up to this point in the book, and will have a strong emphasis through the remaining of the book.

These are: The Spirit, meaning the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Holy Trinity of God.; and “hearing with faith.” These two elements are of critical importance in growing as a Christian, which is Paul’s emphasis in the remaining chapters.

Romans 10:17 So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of God.

Romans 10:17 is a very important Scripture in helping us understand the concept of “hearing with faith” that Paul uses both here in Galatians 3:2 and again in 3:5. “Hearing” has more implication than just hearing with the ears, but also with the mind and the heart. To become a Christian one must hear the Word of the good news (gospel) with more than just the ears, but with the mind and the heart, affecting the will to receive. As it says repeatedly in the book of Revelation, “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.” (2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22). The implication is a hearing and receiving with the whole self.

Note that the correct order of things must be (1) The Word of God, which brings (2) hearing, which brings (3) faith. All true Biblical faith has as its origin, the gospel taught in the Word of God, which when heard and received by our full being results in faith. This is the process BOTH of salvation and of sanctification – growing to become more like Jesus. And this takes us to Paul’s question #2.

Verse 3: Question #3 - How Are You Growing in Jesus? *“Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?”*

Again, Paul call them (and us) foolish – meaning we are not using our spiritual minds – if we think by efforts in the flesh we are either saved OR becoming more like Jesus. Here Paul introduced the theological concept of SANCTIFICATION, which is being made more like Jesus day by day as we trust in Him. We will never become perfect in this life, but we do become more like him as we “trust and obey.” Again, a verse from Romans will help us to remember that this is God’s will for us:

Romans 8:29a For those whom [God] foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son . . .

In the previous verse, Paul reiterates that we are saved by faith alone. In this verse Paul teaches

through this question, that we are also SANCTIFIED (perfected, or made more like Jesus each day) by FAITH ALONE through the Holy Spirit who indwells us. It is as we give the Spirit permission to do His transforming work in us by FAITH = trust and obedience, that we become more like Jesus.

It is NOT by “being better Christians” or “going to church” or any other well intentioned things of self-effort. Nor is it by becoming more “Jewish” through circumcision of the flesh or observance of Old Testament ceremonies that we are made more like Jesus – the very mistake that the Galatians were making.

So what is the process of becoming “perfected” in our walk? What is the instrument that God uses more often than not to make us more like Jesus? The next verse and next question will tell us:

Verse 4: Question #4 – What Best Perfects Your Faith? “Did you suffer so many things in vain – if indeed it was in vain?”

Answer: God uses suffering through trials and temptations to strengthen us as Christians, if we will let these difficult circumstances do their godly work in us.

James 1: 2-4 Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

Paul now asks the Galatians if their suffering through so many difficult circumstances has been in vain. If they have just complained through them, or even just endured them with grim determination, then the trials have been in vain. So he is teaching that they and we must allow difficult circumstances in life to “have their perfect result” as James said it. This perfect result comes from trusting God through the circumstance to bring about spiritual stamina and growth. God wants to get our attention through every difficult circumstance, and he allows each trial for a godly purpose.

The Galatians were missing this important spiritual point – and we must not miss it!

Verse 5: Question #5 – How Is It That the Spirit Does Miracles In and Through You?

“So then, does He who provides you with the Spirit and works miracles among you, do it by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith?”

The Galatians had either seen Jesus’ miracles with their own eyes or heard of them. And we have all heard of them through the Scriptures. So how did Jesus “do” His miracles? Over and over the Gospel accounts make it clear that it was by FAITH IN GOD that the miracles were performed – not by some special effort on Jesus’ part. When the disciples failed to do a miracle that Jesus had sent for them to perform, He told them that they lacked in faith and that they needed more prayer in seeking God.

God wants to do transforming miracles in my life and in yours. And, He want to work miracle through me and you on behalf of others. How will these come? - certainly not by working to become more spiritual, but rather through prayer and complete trust in the Spirit’s power in and through us.

So in these 5 opening verses of chapter 3, Paul introduces the key themes that will encompass the remainder of His letter to the Galatians:

1. SANCTIFICATION BY FAITH

2. HEARING BY FAITH and WALKING BY FAITH
3. WALKING BY THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT

Paul's Old Testament example of this is to be Abraham, as we will see in successive weeks.

But for now, let us consider. Paul's 4 questions teach us that we are...

1. Christians by faith (salvation)
2. Perfected by faith (sanctification)
3. Suffering by faith (endurance)
4. Spirit empowered by faith (fruit producing)

We might think that we have this down pretty well. In this day and age it is not circumcision or Old Testament rituals that distract us from walking by faith and growing into the likeness of Jesus by faith. But we are so susceptible to what Timothy Keller calls "functional saviors" that supplement the all-sufficiency of Christ. He mentions the top 3:

3 "FUNCTIONAL SAVIORS"

1. Comfort
2. Approval
3. Control

When we seek these, we are not seeking Jesus by faith. And more likely than not, when these false "saviors" get blocked from us, we become BITTER.

Rather when Jesus is our comfort, approval and control we get BETTER – meaning we grow into His likeness = SANCTIFICATION.

Again, the issue is the "all-sufficiency of Christ." Is He and He alone what we rely upon to help us to grow into His image? Or is it Jesus PLUS ...

May we learn and learn well to be PERFECTED IN THE SPIRIT